

Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1(Currently amended). ~~A gene~~ An isolated polynucleotide encoding a protein consisting of an amino acid sequence ~~in which one or more amino acid residues are deleted from the C-terminus of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO: 4~~ ID NO:1 and having a ~~thermostable~~ protease activity.

Claim 2 (Cancelled).

3. The ~~protease gene~~ isolated polynucleotide according to claim 2, which consists of the nucleotide ~~[[base]]~~ sequence of SEQ ID NO:2.

Claims 4-19 (Cancelled).

20(New). An isolated polynucleotide encoding a protein consisting of an amino acid sequence in which one or more amino acid residues are deleted form the C-terminus of the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:4, wherein said encoded protein has protease activity and comprises the amino acid sequence of SEQ ID NO:1.